

John Howard Jenkins

May 12, 1960 ~ February 28, 2023

John Howard Jenkins, 62, of Salt Lake City, Utah, died peacefully in the early morning hours of February 28, 2023. Born May 12, 1960 in Salt Lake City, to Joseph Richard Jenkins and Rose Catherine Bennett Jenkins, he was the youngest of three children. Pleased to have been named after his paternal grandfather, he continued the tradition by naming his son after his own father.

John was brilliant from a young age. The first word he learned to spell was A-R-C-H-I-T-E-C-T. Someone asked 5 year old John what he wanted to be when he grew up. He said: a Nobel Prize winner. He read the entire 26-volume Encyclopedia for fun one summer when he was around ten. Having an outstanding memory, he retained what he learned. At recess, he played Star Trek with friends, in the role of Spock, of course. Once on a bet he read one book a day for 365 days, winning the grand prize of a dollar. John was an Eagle Scout. He loved Star Trek, Star Wars, Science, Science Fiction and was an Isaac Asimov super fan. He corresponded with Mr. Asimov, and cherished the signed postcards he received from him growing up. He collected copies of all but 1 or 2 books Asimov wrote. Until John's death he managed the Isaac Asimov Blog and Wiki. John had sophisticated telescopes and loved star-gazing and eclipse watching.

John played the clarinet, very badly, in the Jr. High band. Piano lessons were short-lived. But he constantly listened to classical music growing up and throughout his life. He recognized works and properly identified the composers much better than his music-major wife. He found this amusing; so did she. He did not fancy himself a singer, but could render Gilbert & Sullivan patter songs most excellently, and adored their operettas.

John graduated from Highland High School in 1978, excelled in all subjects except P.E. (he was anti-athletic), was the General Sterling Scholar, and the school Valedictorian. By the end of high school, John was proficient in FRENCH and LATIN. He enjoyed attending the Utah Shakespeare Festival over the years. He passed on his talents, his academic prowess, his clever wit, and his love for Oxford commas to his children.

He graduated from the University of Utah, adding CLASSICAL GREEK, and earning degrees in both Math and History in three years' time. His studies were interrupted for two years while he served as a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Hong Kong Mission. While serving, he achieved extreme fluency in CANTONESE (plus reading and writing skills—atypical for missionaries), and he later learned conversational MANDARIN.

John met the tall, red-headed love of his life, Heidi Nelson, on the first day of 7th grade in homeroom math class. Over the next 11 years they went out only 4 times or so, but were good friends. John lost many battles along the way, but was happy to be the one who won the war! They were married in the Salt Lake Temple on June 27, 1983. She frequently told him that he was so weird. He always proudly responded with "Thank you!" or "I know!" Heidi did

concede that he was a “good” weird. She was a constant, loving support for John in all his endeavors throughout their married life. They were blessed with three children, Mary Catherine, Joseph Richard, and Olivia Rose, each of whom John loved dearly; they look exactly like him—not a redhead among them!

John obtained two Master’s Degrees from the University of California at Berkeley, first studying Classical Roman and Greek History for a year, then switching to: History of Traditional Chinese Science/Astronomy; and Mathematics. While there he studied RUSSIAN and GERMAN, and worked in the Molecular Biology and Biochemistry Lab. His wife claims he was overly-educated. John declared that is not possible. He completed the coursework for two corresponding PhDs as well, but was then snatched away (to Silicon Valley) by Apple to become a Computer Scientist/Software Engineer—during a hiring freeze. It’s a good thing he took that one computer class as an undergrad! Heidi observed he was his own computer, and thought like one, so it worked. When newly wed, he started building his own computer that would support Chinese characters, but Apple released one before he could finish. Apple had him learn JAPANESE. John worked on the first Unicode Text Layout engine for macOS, used in early versions. Some years later, he moved to the Fonts team where he worked on tooling required to build Apple’s Fonts. John was one of the main contributors to the Font Book application. He represented Apple at the Ideographic Research Group. John spent his entire career working with Unicode, and represented Apple to Unicode. For a time he served as a Technical Director of Unicode, representing Unicode. He traveled worldwide, mostly in East Asia, and would always go via his beloved Hong Kong. His expertise in the Chinese language and the Deseret alphabet were an integral part of his work for Apple. And yes, it was he who added the Deseret alphabet to Unicode! Over the years he published dozens of popular public domain works in that phonetic alphabet. He authored a number of original books in many genres. His wife accidentally discovered one day that he had produced his own translation of the New Testament from the original Greek.

While in grad school he began studying ITALIAN just for fun, but got too busy. Over the decades he learned smatterings of conversational KOREAN, HINDI, YIDDISH, VIETNAMESE, and others. The highest number of languages ever used by him in one sentence at home was five—delightful. In most recent years John attempted to learn WELSH, the language of his ancestors. Surprisingly, he was finding it extremely difficult. He deigned not to learn Spanish or Norwegian, his wife’s second languages, but excelled at imitating them humorously.

In 2000, after 17 years living in Berkeley and San Jose, CA, the family moved back to Utah to be near family and assist with aging parents. Since then he continued to work for Apple, remotely—20 years before the pandemic made telecommuting fashionable.

John was a scriptural scholar and consistently read the Bible and the standard works in their entirety every year. Because of his expertise in history and ancient languages (yes, he studied HEBREW also), his vast knowledge of the scriptures, and his own wonderful spiritual insights, he was a master Gospel Doctrine Sunday School Teacher. A devoted and faithful member of the Church, he had a strong faith in God and a testimony of the atoning sacrifice of our Savior, Jesus Christ. He was without guile and treated everyone equally and lovingly. We take comfort in knowing that he now advances to a brighter place in his eternal progression, freed from mortal cares and trials, reunited with loved ones who have gone before. We rejoice in this with him and for him.

John is preceded in death by his parents and his favorite cousin, Jamie Lowden. He is survived by his wife, Heidi, and children: Mary (Admiral), Richard, and Olivia; and his sisters Maren Jenkins Durham (Paul), and Catherine Bates (Douglas). Though he played the curmudgeon, it was with a twinkle in his eye. John’s intelligence, sense of humor, unfailing kindness, friendship, and example will be missed and ever cherished by all who knew him.

NOTE: Due to family medical circumstances, previously announced funeral services have been postponed. Updated information will be posted. The family sincerely apologizes for any inconvenience, and is appreciative of the great outpouring of love and support it has received.

UPDATE:

We are grateful to be able to go ahead with traditional Funeral Services:

Visitation: FRI, March 17, 6-8:00pm, Sunset Lawn: 2350 E. 1300 S.

Funeral: SAT, March 18 @ 12:00 noon: Foothill 7th Ward / 2215 E. Roosevelt Ave. / Salt Lake City (visitation prior to service, 10-11:45am).

Interment: Sunset Lawn

Zoom link

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89800707294

“Everyone in the world should be able to use their own language on phones and computers.” Unicode, a non-profit organization, has a fund-raising program for underrepresented languages of the world. This worthy cause was a huge part of John’s professional life. To make a contribution in his memory, visit https://www.unicode.org/consortium/adopt-a-character.html.